

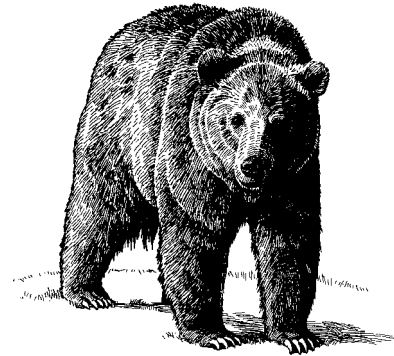


# Grizzly Bear Recovery

## Overview and Update

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### BACKGROUND

When Lewis and Clark explored the West in the early 1800s, an estimated 50,000 grizzly bears roamed between the Pacific Ocean and the Great Plains, across vast stretches of open and unpopulated land. But when pioneers moved in, bears were persecuted and their numbers and range drastically declined. As European settlement expanded over the next hundred years, towns and cities sprung up, and habitat for these large omnivores -- along with their numbers -- shrunk drastically. Today, with the western United States inhabited by millions of Americans, only a few small corners of grizzly country remain, supporting about 1,200-1,400 wild grizzly bears.

In 1975, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service listed the grizzly bear as a threatened species in the Lower 48 States, placing the species under federal protection. This status led to implementation of a grizzly bear recovery plan, as required under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). The objective of recovery of listed species is to achieve self-sustaining populations in the wild that no longer need protection under the ESA.

The first Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan was developed by 1982. In 1983 the Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee (IGBC) was formed -- with members from the National Park Service; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; USDA Forest Service; the states of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming; and British Columbia -- to recover grizzly bears.

### THE ROAD TO RECOVERY

While the historic range of grizzlies once covered over a third of what is now the continental United States, the Recovery Plan necessarily focuses on the six remaining areas in Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming that have habitat suitable for self-sustaining grizzly populations; only five of these are currently inhabited by grizzlies.

#### Grizzly Ecosystems

Yellowstone  
Northern Continental Divide  
Selkirk  
Cabinet-Yaak  
North Cascades  
Bitterroot

#### Current Minimum Population Estimates

550-600 bears  
400+ bears  
30-40 bears  
30-40 bears  
2-3 bears  
none

In the ecosystems currently inhabited by bears, recovery efforts have included reducing the potential for human-bear encounters and related bear mortality, and providing secure habitat for females to raise their young. Recovery activities include public education, reduction in bear access to human food and garbage, evaluation of road densities, research on availability of grizzly foods, and other study of bears and their habitat. Using the best currently available scientific data, an IGBC subcommittee for each ecosystems focuses on specific actions, with the goal of ensuring adequate numbers of bears and suitable habitat for sustaining recovered populations.

### Yellowstone

As the habitat area most remote from the other remaining grizzly bear habitat, the Yellowstone ecosystem has been the primary focus of grizzly recovery efforts to date. This work has been very successful; the grizzly population numbers and distribution here have exceeded target recovery levels for the last several years. The population of adult females grizzlies, for example, has grown from a low point in 1983 of less than 30 to over 100 today. Recovery work continues to reduce grizzly bear mortalities and ensure habitat standards for maintaining a recovered population. The Conservation Strategy for managing this population in the future, once it is recovered and removed from federal ESA protection, was finalized in March 2003 .

### Northern Continental Divide

The grizzly population in this area includes Glacier National Park and adjacent areas in Canada. A planned non-invasive genetic sampling is to begin in 2004 by the Greater Glacier Bear DNA Project to more accurately estimate bear population in this ecosystem.

### Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service determined in early 1999 that the Selkirk and Cabinet-Yaak populations were warranted for listing as endangered. However, Selkirk/Cabinet-Yaak bears are currently precluded from reclassification due to higher priority listing actions for species needing more immediate protection.



### North Cascades

While study of this very rugged and remote habitat indicates that this ecosystem is capable of supporting a self-sustaining population of grizzlies, only a “remnant” population remains, incapable of enduring without active recovery efforts, including possible augmentation with bears from other areas. The Service determined in 1991 that this population was warranted for listing as “endangered.” However, workload on other species in greater danger of extinction has delayed the Service from proposing “endangered” status for these populations. A recovery plan for North Cascades was approved in 1997, but has not been implemented due to lack of funds.

### Bitterroot

Despite numerous studies of this area, there have been no verifiable sightings of grizzly bears for over 50 years. As the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service noted in a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) released in July, 1997, grizzly recovery in this ecosystem would require the reintroduction of bears from other areas. The Service proposed such reintroduction as its preferred alternative in the draft EIS; the final EIS was released in March, 2000, with the Service’s final decision following in 30-90 days. Any reintroduction would depend on funding.